



Operation Fuel Testimony in Support of SB 4, AAC The CT Clean Air Act.
Transportation Committee Chairs Lemar and Haskell, Ranking Members Carney and Somers
Environment Committee Chairs Gresko and Cohen, Ranking Members Harding and Miner
<https://www.cga.ct.gov/2022/TOB/S/PDF/2022SB-00004-R01-SB.PDF>

March 11, 2022

**Transportation Committee Chairs Lemar and Haskell, Ranking Members Carney and Somers;
Environment Committee Chairs Gresko and Cohen, Ranking Members Harding and Miner, and
distinguished members of both committees:**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 4, AAC The CT Clean Air Act. Operation Fuel appreciates the committee's efforts for cleaner air, more transportation options, and lower carbon emissions. There are many great parts of this bill, including increasing funding for public transportation, electrifying CT's vehicle fleets, and converting our school buses from diesel to electric. Operation Fuel is particularly excited to express our enthusiastic support for equitably expanding e bike access in CT.

Operation Fuel ensures equitable access to energy for all by providing year-round energy and utility assistance, promoting energy independence, and advocating for affordable energy. We partner with local government and community-based organizations throughout Connecticut to ensure that low- and moderate-income (LMI) families and individuals in need have access to year-round utility and water assistance. We started in the late 1970s as the nation's first fuel bank, helping struggling families pay for heat. Today our programs have grown to include electricity and water bill assistance, as well as homelessness intervention. Increasingly, transportation insecurity and costs are a burden for the families we serve. We encourage CT residents struggling to pay utility bills to visit our online portal at www.operationfuel.org/gethelp, where you can apply 24/7.

Operation Fuel is grateful to the leadership and everyone who has advocated for more affordable, more accessible, cleaner transportation in our state. While Operation Fuel focuses on energy assistance primarily, transportation is a major issue for our low- and moderate-income clients. The purchase and maintenance costs of owning a vehicle are prohibitive for many households in our state. Operation Fuel contributed to the 2020 VEIC and Green Bank study "[Mapping Household Energy and Transportation Affordability in CT](#)," which reports that transportation costs reach unaffordable levels in every county in the state, and that residents without cars experience limited mobility and economic opportunity. Additionally, transportation costs eat up household budgets. In some census tracts in our state, combined

housing, energy, and transportation costs – just those 3 basic needs – take up more than 2/3 of a household budget. SB 4 addresses these challenges by investing in clean transit fleets, school buses, and e-bikes.

In addition to their toxic emissions and high costs, cars are also dangerous. So far in 2022, less than 3 months into the year, [speeding drivers have killed 16 people](#) while they were walking, biking or scooting. We know from the Vision Zero Network and American Public Transportation Association (APTA) that more cars on the road increases the likelihood of traffic violence, while [adding more bus trips](#) – even for those who don't take the bus and drive themselves alone – decreases the risk of crashes. Last year, this committee took action on road safety, and CT is now becoming a Vision Zero state. Operation Fuel supported that bill last year and continues to appreciate the excellent work of the Vision Zero Council under Deputy Commissioner Garrett Eucalitto and his team. While we appreciate the interest in electric cars and trucks, and their charging infrastructure, much of this behemoth investment from our state and federal governments will not benefit our clients who can't afford cars. For pollution, safety, and equity reasons, we don't just need *cleaner* cars – we need *fewer* cars.

Originally designed for [older, disabled, and rural riders](#), e bikes are an excellent mobility solution for diverse communities and residents. They increase a person's range of travel, without the first mile/ last mile, frequency, or transfer challenges that come with riding the bus. To use an e bike, there is minimal charging infrastructure (a plug works!) or storage; no parking is required. E bikes can travel to, from, and even on buses. And bikes are door to door – for some trips in urban, suburban, and rural environments, e bikes may be faster than driving a car. As VEIC's study shows, and CT bus riders know, there is room for improvement in CT's bus service throughout our cities. Many small towns and rural areas in CT have very little or no transit service. For our clients who get around without cars in the more remote parts of the state, e bikes are a great fit.

Operation Fuel supports the committee's goals to accelerate equitable e bike adoption in our state. In addition to the Vision Zero council, we follow the work of the brilliantly named CT Hydrogen and Electric Automobile Rebate (CHEAPR) program. In Fall 2020, DEEP announced the agency does not consider bicycles to be "vehicles," and therefore excludes rebates from going to e bikes – reserving these incentives for more expensive cars and trucks. Unfortunately, this prohibition has negative consequences for LMI families in our state who can't afford cars - even with a \$5,000 tax credit. E bikes sell for roughly \$1200 and up. That \$5,000 credit could pay for a cutting edge cargo bike that a parent could use for child transport and errands on the same trip. We believe that the resident is in the best position to decide if a car or e bike suits their needs. Each person deserves to choose for themselves how they get around. Instead of capping the bike voucher at the bill's lower level, we should let the resident decide how they want to spend it. For many, e bikes are a more economical option, as getting a car means taking on monthly payments, insurance, interest, and more. Operation Fuel requests that the committee amend these sections to create more favorable incentives for the bikes. We also hope that the bill allows for an implementation process that is as friendly as possible to the consumer, ideally with incentives at the point of sale instead of kicking in later. Also, since e

bike sales have exploded during the pandemic, the committee may consider retroactive rebates for LMI residents.

Operation Fuel has just a few notes on the specific language of the bill. Regarding the changes to the CHEAPR board [starting on line 306], Operation Fuel recommends adding an e bike manufacturer's representative and bike sales representative who are based in the state. Additionally, we note that the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) issued a significant decision on EV charging in 2021, Docket 17-12-03RE04. PURA has considerable expertise in the technology and cost of scaling up EV deployment. We believe that our state resources are better leveraged with PURA directly informing CHEAPR's work and decisions as a board member along with the other state agencies.

Regarding eligibility for e bike vouchers [Lines 393-396], we would like to add Operation Fuel clients to the list. In addition to expanding eligibility to more LMI households in our state, this would be an effective way to inform residents of the new program. We would be glad to discuss

In conclusion, offering quality choices that do not burden low-income residents with the very high costs of car maintenance will make it easier for people to make medical appointments, go to school, and get a new job. Car-free and car-lite households also reduce pollution in CT communities. Thank you for your dedicated efforts to make clean transportation options as accessible as possible for families in our state.

Submitted by
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